

Diocese responds to proposed condom plan

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Reacting to the Monroe County health director's proposal that free condoms be distributed to students in Rochester public high schools, the Diocese of Rochester has released a statement suggesting that discussion of the issue be placed in "the broader context of teenage sexuality."

The diocesan statement, issued June 18, says that the diocese's "concern is for the physical as well as the spiritual health of our young people." The statement affirms Catholic teachings calling for youths "to abstain from non-marital sex."

Early this month, Dr. Andrew Doniger, county health director, asked officials of the Rochester City School District to consider distributing condoms in district high schools. He made the proposal in light of a

high incidence of teenage pregnancy and venereal disease among the schools' population.

Added weight for Doniger's proposal also was provided by a recent report that two Rochester teens have become the county's first confirmed cases of AIDS among youths aged 15-19.

In a telephone interview with the *Catholic Courier*, Doniger noted, for example, that in 1988 one out of every six city girls in the 15-19 bracket became pregnant. In 1989, one in every 15 city youths in that group contracted gonorrhea, he said.

Even more alarming, Doniger said, is that two youths in the 15-19 age group recently were diagnosed as having contracted AIDS, acquired immune deficiency syndrome — the first such cases confirmed in the county in that age bracket.

Doniger said he made the suggestion in

order to push city school officials to study the issue. The Rochester City School Board has the authority to decide whether condoms should be distributed in schools.

In addition, Doniger said his proposal was motivated in part by the New York City Board of Education's decision earlier this year to approve distribution of condoms in public schools there.

That decision was affirmed by the New York State Board of Regents in May, despite opposition from Cardinal John J. O'Connor of the Archdiocese of New York and from the New York State Catholic Conference.

Condom distribution is scheduled to begin in New York City schools this fall.

Although Doniger said he is personally opposed to teenage sexual activity — due to the negative emotional consequences, and the risk of pregnancy and venereal disease — he said the appearance of AIDS cases makes it imperative for sexually active youths to use condoms.

"I think that when we have a fatal disease in the community, we need to have options available," Doniger said.

But making condoms available sends the wrong message to youths, countered Anne Paluskiewicz, associate director for human sexuality for the diocesan Department of Youth.

"If you say that abstinence is the greatest goal, but using condoms is an appropriate alternative and kids feel they have adults' approval for that, they will not shoot for the highest ideal," declared Paluskiewicz, who helped write the diocesan statement.

The diocesan statement refers to the *Statement on School Based Clinics*, issued by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in 1987. The USCC document states that "providing contraceptives to unmarried teenagers contributes to the illusion that it is always possible to have sexual intercourse without being prepared to assume the responsibility of parenthood."

Quoting from the USCC document, the diocesan statement says: "Programs which promote contraceptives in the cause of 'safe' or 'safer sex,' or which place such practices on the same level as marital fidelity, abstinence or the avoidance of promiscuous sexual behavior, will inevitably weaken and distort the message that teenagers urgently need to hear."

In its statement, the diocese also echoed the USCC's call for improving social and economic opportunities for young people in low-income areas; supporting parental efforts to teach their children healthy values; and creating programs to promote chastity and fidelity.

Nazareth, McQuaid refuse Channel One programming

By Barbara Ann Homick
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Nazareth Academy decided last month to turn down Whittle Communications' offer to provide the school with \$50,000 worth of free video equipment as part of an agreement to broadcast Whittle's Channel One programming in classrooms.

Principal Sister Ann Collins, SSJ, announced that Nazareth officials rejected Whittle's offer because they believed Channel One programming promotes commercialism.

The programming "doesn't come out of our values ... our Gospel values," Sister Collins said.

Channel One is produced by Whittle Communications, a Tennessee-based company owned by Christopher Whittle. The show combines slick MTV-like graphics with news and feature items delivered by news anchors aged 18 to 24. It consists of 10 minutes of news and features, broken up by four 30-second commercials.

Adele McCarthy, Nazareth's director of development and community relations, explained that Channel One "is so clearly promoting commercialism, and we are uncomfortable with that."

Such perceptions of commercialism have embroiled Channel One in controversy ever since its inception in 1989. The states of New York, California and Rhode Island have banned Channel One programming in their public schools.

Yet administrators of five Catholic high schools in the Diocese of Rochester express little concern about Channel One's commercialism.

Two of the five already are on-line with the network, two have signed contracts to begin airing Channel One programming in the fall, and one is leaning seriously toward signing with Whittle later this month.

Bishop Kearney was the first school to sign a contract with Whittle, beginning broadcasts of Channel One programs in January. Last month, Aquinas Institute became the second Whittle connection in the diocese.

Only officials at McQuaid Jesuit High School have taken a position similar to that adopted at Nazareth. After several months of research, McQuaid administrators recently decided to decline Whittle's offer, according to Father Daniel O'Brien, SJ, president.

"We felt that it is just a commercial enterprise of Mr. Whittle's and it would be intrusive into the school day," said Father O'Brien.

Among the channel's advertisers are Pepsi Cola, Frito-Lay, Nike footwear and Burger King. Although students see most

of these advertisements on their televisions at home, Nazareth officials said the classroom is not the place to promote products.

"We are worried about TV dehumanizing our kids," Sister Collins said. "Why bring them to school and turn on the TV?"

Free hi-tech equipment — including a television monitor for every classroom — is an enticing side benefit for many schools, but the conditions imposed by Whittle's three-year contracts have scared other schools away.

Schools accepting the Channel One agreement with Whittle must agree to broadcast the program during at least 90 percent of the school year. That restriction means administrators can opt to omit no more than 11 out of the 160 annual broadcasts.

Sister Collins acknowledged that turning down the equipment was the hardest decision for the Nazareth faculty to make.

Joe Biondolillo, Nazareth's director of guidance, said he first believed the equipment would benefit the school, especially in the guidance department. But after hearing the concerns of other administrators, Biondolillo agreed that he wasn't ready to accept the conditions of the agreement.

"Not being able to select the tape content would be a disaster," the guidance director remarked. "Once we signed, the flexibility would be gone."

Nevertheless, four of the other five diocesan high schools have determined that Channel One's benefits — the video equipment, in particular — outweigh any possible liabilities.

Whittle has provided Aquinas with 39 video monitors — one for each classroom — and Sadler said the school hopes to purchase videocassette recorders for each classroom as well as extra monitors for the cafeteria. Plans are also being made to use the equipment to broadcast school events and activities in conjunction with journalism classes.

Charla Kucko, director of enrollment and public relations at Our Lady of Mercy, said her school has similar plans for the equipment received after signing with Whittle in May.

Likewise, officials at Geneva DeSales High School are excited that their school will go on-line with Channel One on Sept. 1, according to Edward J. Tracey, principal.

Officials at Elmira Notre Dame High School will not decide until the end of June whether to accept Whittle's Channel One proposal, according to school principal, Sister Mary Walter Hickey, RSM.

Although the school has been researching the pros and cons of the program, Sister Hickey noted, "It looks like we are leaning towards it."



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer
A NEW HOME — The first Vietnamese family sponsored by the Vietnamese Catholic Community of Rochester arrived at the Greater Rochester International Airport on June 12. Above, translator The Nguyen (right) goes over sponsorship papers with (from left) Van H. Huynh, Hai Van Tran, and Ha Tran.

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